CAMP WHITE
GRENADE
II

"Preserving the Past for the Future"

March 2004 Edition

Camp White Prisoners of War

The world has turned over many times since the first German prisoners of war arrived at Camp White. Today, very few residents of Jackson County, Oregon know that at one time soldiers of one of the world's most lethal killing machines were housed within a few miles of their homes. This machine had conquered Czechoslovakia, Poland, and France. It had brought Russia to its knees and was posed at England's doorstep when the world united to destroy its evil purpose. When the German soldiers arrived, it was no secret. Fortunately, time heals many wounds but then, unlike now, the thought of having members of this evil regime housed so close to the citizens of Southern Oregon was not well received. Time and distance has changed our attitudes towards those who were confined at Camp White's POW compound, which is good, but the history of the complex and what happened there should not be forgotten.

By April 11th 1944, when POWs began to arrive at Camp White, most of the Post was empty. The combat units had completed their training and had been shipped out to the four corners of the earth. Most of the 1300 buildings that had once housed these troops now stood vacant.

By December of 1944, Lieutenant John Fahey described Camp White ". . . as an abandoned city of wartime buildings. It stretched for several miles on either side of the principal highway between Medford and Crater Lake . . . the installation lay dormant; typewriters, desks, chairs and bunks stood ready in deserted buildings. Gates were unguarded, but military police roved the paved streets . . . the whole place exuded an eerie quality. It seemed that, if a voice called "Action!" everything might spring to life."

The POW compound was located in the NW corner of the Post in what had been an area used to train the Evacuation Hospitals. Approximately 30 to 40 buildings were enclosed within inner and outer chain linked fences. Guard dogs were placed between the two fences until the POWs cut through the inner one and made pets out of the animals. The enclosed area consisted of barracks, mess halls and supply structures. They, as was the rest of the Camp, were painted Army green (olive drab) with green composition roofs. With the exception of the fencing, guard towers, and well-graded area surrounding the installation, you could not distinguish it from the rest of the post.

The first POWs to arrive were transferred from Arizona, most having been captured in 1943 in North Africa. This group consisted of one German major and one other medical officer, the rest were enlisted personnel. Most were not Nazi fanatics but many of the senior German NCOs who assumed responsibility for discipline within the compound were. The current Army philosophy was that a disciplined POW compound was a quiet compound. *Continued on insert*

Museum Report

Awareness Day is coming again Members. The day is Saturday March 27th. and the Museum will open at 9am with the parade to begin at 10am☺.

We have several entries this year from the young marines backed up by the Eagle Point band Drum line to the Military Vehicle club.

Dr. Chris Hald former company commander of the 91st ID 361st Inf. Reg. I company of WW2 and retired Col out of the National Guard will be our Grand Marshal.

The VA is upgrading and integrating our alarm system for us so we will be tied into the whole facility

The Grenade II

The Grenade II is the official newsletter of the Camp White Historical Association.

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The **Grenade II** *accepts suggestions and contributions from readers. If you have a story idea or appropriate event to promote write:*

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Commanders Corner

The Camp White Historical Association names claim of having the Second largest museum in Jackson County Oregon. We not only have the square footage to make this claim but also a website http://www.campwhite.org that has over 18,000 visitors (11,000 this year alone). In addition we also have presentations designed in power point and given to any Organization that wants some history of the past 1942 to 1946 Camp White and beyond to the Veteran Administration rehab center of 2004. We have videos and DVD's to sell or show to any group interested, these were produced by SOPTV the local PBS affiliate. We give tours to special groups that request them fore weekend and any time requested. The Association also maintains a Military research library this includes history from the Indian wars to Military units that trained at camp white during WW2. Intensive research has been completed on the POW's that were at Camp White and other Camps. We also have had College and High School Students use our research Library. We have the old VA fire truck along with our WW2 Jeep for our parades in the local area. They serve to advertise The Camp White Historical Association. We must not forget our Italian friends who honor our fallen soldiers of WW2 in Italy every Memorial Day at the cemeteries in Italy. Every year they place a reef for us. We have begun our seventh year of being open to the public and proud of our record serving the public.

Al Inlow
Commander

Continued from page 1. It was felt that German discipline was the best in the world but unfortunately it also placed many Nazis in charge. The POWs were organized into eight companies with German NCOs and an American officer in charge of each. The general population was not static; at it height 2400 prisoners were housed in an area designed for 2000. As the war progressed, the military backgrounds of the prisoners would also change. Before the prison was closed in April of 1946, prisoners associated with the German S.A. and S.S. would be housed at the facility. Although discipline was established early, there were incidents when POWs refused to follow direction. The first involved POWs not from the main compound but rather at the Hospital. Building 215 had been set aside as a medical facility for prisoners and as a suitable area for protected class POWs (anti Nazis) as a protected class compound had not been built yet. Their duties included the cleaning of the building which they refused to do stating that they were to be used for the care of the sick and wounded only. Major Edward Shannahan explained to the POWs that they would obey all orders issued by American officers and if they felt they had a grievance, they could report it to the Swiss Legation who was responsible for solving prisoner issues. The aggrieved parties were now faced with two new problems. First, the proximity of the Swiss Legation would require sometime for the issue to be resolved and secondly because of the lack of a protected class compound, the only people between the aggrieved and the main camp was the officers they refused to obey. The issue was quickly settled.

As the population began to change, an "anti Nazi" compound was built for those prisoners who had been threatened by Nazis in the main prison. Nazi discipline in camps throughout the U.S. to be severe and in most cases the victim would be wrapped in a blanket to prevent his being able to identify the perpetrators and beaten severely. American officers tried to identify prisoners who might be at risk but it was difficult. One observant young officer advised that the only way to identify an anti Nazi within the main compound was to look for the one POW the others were chasing.

Although not as extreme as in many other camps, the Nazis at Camp White did take their toll on innocent victims. In many camps Nazis had murdered and brutalized the non believers. In most cases, suicides were staged; victims were hung so that American officers would not spend time investigating the crime. As anti Nazi compounds were built and protected class prisoners were placed in the facilities, Nazis found that they could gain access by feigning repentance. Even these new protected class areas were not safe. One unusual death occurred at Camp White when a young German soldier committed suicide after he had been transferred to the anti Nazi compound. He was discovered hanging in the kitchen clucking a butcher knife. It was said that he had not only hung himself, but had also tried to slit his own throat. The suggested motive was that although he had escaped the radicals in the main camp, his family was still at risk in Germany. In September of 1944, the POW's went on strike protesting the transfer of 18 others. The incident was short lived as the only American counter offer was the elimination of the beer ration. In May of 1945, the dogs were again returned to the inner perimeter fence patrol. This caused quite a problem as the prisoners found that the retrained animals were no longer friendly. Complaints were not limited to the enlisted prisoners only. By October of 1944, there were four German medical officers and a dentist at Camp White. Officers have privileges and these included the Germans. They were housed in a separate area outside the compound and were allowed more freedom than the enlisted personnel. This included private rooms and their own personal orderly. Unfortunately, or at least they thought it unfortunate, they were served from the American mess facility. *Continued on back*

Continued from other side By early1945, the prisoner population had become even more varied as POWs captured in France were sent to Camp White. As Germany lost more and more of it young men, the difference in ages of POWs also increased with the youngest of 18 and the oldest of 56. Attitudes of the new POWs were passive in their relationship to the Nazi prisoners. Those captured in 1944 had seen the Normandy invasion and knew that the war was lost. Although the reading of newspapers was encouraged and radios were not forbidden, Nazi POWs continued to believe that the war was still advancing their cause. VE day was of particular concern for the Americans. They were unsure how the prisoners would react and took special precautions. During the evening and night time hours, Americans patrolled the interior of the compound, checking under the barracks anticipating Nazi suicides. The night passed without incident but the following weeks revealed that many prisoners still did not believe the reports. In an attempt to convince the fanatics that the war was over, the War Department sent recently captured POWs to camps throughout the U.S.

Lieutenant Fahey described the arrival of the first contingent at Camp White. Not realizing what to expect, he had assumed a position just inside the compound. As the new arrivals marched through the main gate, one of the prisoners broke ranks when he herd his name called by a familiar voice, that of his dad. They had been separated after enlisting in the German Army and now rushed to embrace each other. Although attitudes did not change as realization that the war was lost, the identified enemy did. Several POWs asked that they be allowed to join American forces fighting the Japanese. They were viewed as opportunists whose real intend was to ingratiate themselves with their American captors. It was also felt that they hoped to avoid repatriation to a devastated Germany which might include living in the occupied communist sector.

By May of 1945, Hauptfeldwebel (Master Sergeant) Karl Brandl had been replaced by Master Sergeant Walter Enscanodas as the POW spokesman. Unfortunately we know little of Brandl as his name does not appear on the list of prisoners but Enscanodas was described by Lieutenant Fahey as a stanch Nazi. He had served with the 15th Panzer Division until he was captured in May of 1943. Although he appeared unable to speak English, it was generally felt that he had sufficient command of the language that American personnel had to be discreet when he was present.

In March of 1945, the first issue of an American sponsored German magazine "Der Ruf" appeared at the camp. Although the contents had been written by German POWs, Enscanodas felt that it was nothing more than American propaganda. He purchased and destroyed most of the first issues but Lieutenant Fahey and other American officers solved this problem by limiting the sale to one copy per POW. Enscanodas continued to discouraged prisoners from buying them.

By July of 1945, prisoner complaints began to subside. The POWs were now aware that the War was lost and the next step was repatriation. During a Red Cross visit, the POW problems presented were the lack of items to drink in the Canteen and that no blankets had been furnished to prisoners who were confined to the guardhouse. Although these prisoners had been told to take their issued blankets with them, they had either refused or did not want to follow orders. Of these prisoners, 12 had been recent transfers from another camp and had caused trouble at the main compound. Those being incarcerated for more than seven days had their heads shaved which the POWs considered unfair. *Continued on pg 3*

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Several changes now began to influence the thoughts of the prisoners. They all began to think that those who were not Nazis were the ones who would probably be repatriated first, thus, it only made sense that their day of repentance was at hand. Also the re-transfer of 135 stanch Nazis who had caused previous problems at a camp at Rupert, Idaho also began to influence camp thought. Internees realized that Nazi influence was beginning to subside and the fear of being the subject of a Nazi reprisal began to decline. Finally, what had been a clandestine American attempt to influence the Germans began to have some effect. As part of this program, the movie "Why We Fight", which originally been developed to explain the world's political situation to newly inducted G.I.s, was translated into German and presented to the POWs. But it was not until the prisoners saw photos in Life Magazine that they began to believe the evil the Nazis had perpetuated upon the world. Although "Why We Fight" gave explicit pictures of the same atrocities, the POWs felt the film was American propaganda.

By October of 1945 when Military Staff Writer Herman Edwards of the Oregonian began writing an expose on Camp White's POWs, he could only find one prisoner who professed to be a Nazi. The others having seen the light of repatriation had not only become more respectful of their captors but now identified the cause of their downfall as that of Hitler and his ilk. Although still proud, most professed that the failure of the Nazi party was that it was a dictatorship and that the average German had no input as far as his government was concerned.

The camp would continue to remain open until April of 1946, when the last of it prisoners were shipped to Ft. Lewis. The Camp White question had not been settled yet but it was obvious that the facility was doomed. Buildings were auctioned and demolished to be reconstructed else where. The impact of the post would be one of Oregon's everlasting legacies. G.I.s as well as POWs would return to the Rogue Valley to live having been exposed to its climate and people. .Unfortunately, Lieutenant Fahey's call of "Action" would never be herd. Today the area that was once the prisoner of war compound is included within the Kodak facility and open fields. As I walked the area recently, I wondered how many of the occupants of the several vehicles that passed realized that they were traveling through what was once an area occupied by members of Hitler's army.

I would like to thank several people who helped me revisit the past. Fred Granata of Portland, Oregon who provided the museum with several wartime documents which included the names of the POW confined in the stockade as of October, 1945. John Fahey whose article "Reminiscence" appeared in the winter 1992-93 Oregon Historical Quarterly and helped me identify important occurrences at the compound. Lance J. Ferraro, from Southern Oregon University, whose December, 2001 paper on the prisoners gave me a great deal of insight into the camp.

Del Hussey, Camp White Historian

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